

Geographical variation in *Philetairus socius* (Latham)

by C. M. N. WHITE

Received 4th February, 1967

When I dealt with this species in my *Check List* (1963) the material available was very limited. Additional material shows that four forms must be recognised:

P. s. geminus Grote

Scaly edges to upper side are white; under side almost white. Region of Etoscha Pan, Ovamboland.

P. s. socius (Latham)

Scaly edges to upper side buff; under side greyish sandy. South-west Africa south of last to the Orange river.

P. s. eremnus Clancey

Darker, more grey-brown, less sandy above than the nominate and with a darker and greyer, less sandy buff under side. Interior of north-west Cape Province to Asbestos Mts. and Prieska.

P. s. lepidus Smith

Warmer and browner above than nominate race; crown redder and under side a darker warm buffy. Southern Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Kimberley area of Cape Province to west Transvaal and adjacent Orange Free State.

I am indebted to Professor Winterbottom for facilities to examine material in the Cape Town Museum and to Mr. M. P. Stuart Irwin for facilities at the National Museum, Bulawayo.

The apparent affinities of *Ifrita*

by C. J. O. HARRISON

Received 22nd June, 1967

In a short communication Desfayes (1967) has proposed that *Ifrita kowaldi* of New Guinea, usually regarded as the representative of a monotypic genus of babbler, of the subfamily Cinclosomatinae, should be removed to the true flycatchers, Muscicapinae, and be regarded as a member of the genus *Niltava*. The proposal is apparently based on a superficial resemblance of the blue crown and warm buff body colour of *Ifrita* to those of some *Niltava* species, and on the fact that while *Niltava* species are more terrestrial than most flycatchers, *Ifrita* appears to be mainly terrestrial and feeds largely among fallen branches, and also on the trunks and lower branches of standing trees (Mayr and Rand 1937). These criteria do not appear to justify Desfayes proposal, but in order to test the suggestion *Ifrita kowaldi* is here considered in relation to species of the genus *Niltava* on the one hand, and species of the Australasian babbler genera *Eupetes*, *Todopsis* and *Malurus* on the other. The last two have been included on the basis of two papers (Harrison and Parker, 1965; Harrison, in press) in which it has been shown that there are grounds for regarding a group of genera of the Malurinae—namely *Malurus*, *Stipiturus*, *Amytornis*, *Chenorhamphus*, *Todopsis* and *Clytomyias*—as a specialised Australasian group of babblers.

PLUMAGE COLOUR

1. *Crown of the head.* The crown of *Ifrita kowaldi* is glossy blue with a black patch in the centre and a narrow black border passing across the forehead, back above the eyes, and around the nape where it is very narrow. The crowns of *Niltava grandis* and *N. sundara* are uniformly glossy blue with black on the forehead and sides of the head. On the nape they merge into a dark blue mantle. In both *Ifrita* and *Niltava* this colouring is formed by glossy blue tips to black feathers. In subadult specimens of *Ifrita* these feathers seem broader and there is an unbroken blue coronet, but in adults the feathers appear more lanceolate and the coronet appears to consist of more distinct blue tips with some black feathering showing between, although this may be due, in part, to the make-up of the skins. The crown feathers of *Todopsis wallacei* are similar in having blue tips with black feathering showing between, although here the blue is paler and the blue tips are present over all the crown.

Glossy blue feathers are typical of *Malurus* species, and in *M. coronatus* of northern Australia the blue structural colour is combined with chestnut-red melanin to give a magenta colour. These magenta feathers are homologues of the blue ones and the male of *N. coronatus* has a crown of glossy magenta feathers with a black patch in the centre and a black band extending from the forehead back over the eye and on the ear-coverts, to end as a narrow black band on the nape. In respect of the distribution of colour on the crown *I. kowaldi* most closely resembles *M. coronatus*, a fact which was earlier drawn to my attention by S. A. Parker.

2. *Sides of head and throat.* In *Ifrita kowaldi* the superciliary area is black and the ear-coverts and lores are mainly dark brown with a few fine buff rachial streaks on the former. There is a conspicuous white stripe along the upper ear-coverts, a buff eye-rim, and an indistinct buff patch near the nostrils.

In *Niltava* both sexes have a patch of glossy blue feathers just posterior to the ear-coverts. The males have uniformly black sides of the head and throat. The females have pale buffish throats and the sides of the head are browner, with some fine buffish rachial streaks. *N. sundara* females have a crescentic white patch just below the throat.

The babbler species tend to have conspicuous and variable patterning on the sides of the head and throat, but *Todopsis wallacei*, in addition to resembling *Ifrita* in crown colour, also resembles it in that the superciliary area is black, the ear-coverts dark with a conspicuous white stripe along the upper ear-coverts and there is a white eye-rim and white tips to the feathers near the nostrils. The throat is white with a faint buff tint. The dark ear-coverts are formed by the blackish basal portions of lanceolate feathers which are white towards the tip and upswept to form part of the white streak. While dissimilar in this respect from similar feathers in *Ifrita* the white tips may relate to the pale buff streaks on the ear-covert feathers of the latter in that both represent a terminal loss of pigment. *Malurus alboscapulatus* females also show pale buffish rachial streaks on the ear-coverts, although these are less well-defined than in the species mentioned, and they show a pale eye-rim and pale feather patches at the nostrils, as also do females of *M. coronatus*.

3. *Body colour.* *Ifrita kowaldi* is warm buff ventrally, and olive brown dorsally and on wings and tail. The only distinctive marks are pale buff tips on greater and median wing-coverts. The females of *Niltava* are varying shades of olive brown, paler ventrally and immaculate. The only possible suggestion of resemblance to *Ifrita* is in the male of *N. sundara* which has a warm orange-buff underside. Dorsally it is dark blue and other *Niltava* species are dark blue or grey below as well.

There is no suggestion of direct similarity between *Ifrita* and any of the babbler species in body colour, save that females of *Malurus* species tend to be brown above and buffish below. *Todopsis wallacei* does, however, have white tips on the median wing-coverts, and similar tips tending to become elongated to stripes on the greater wing-coverts. *Eupetes leucostictus* and some *Cinclosoma* species also show white or pale spots on the tips of the wing-coverts.

GENERAL MORPHOLOGY

The relatively large head and short body of *Ifrita* give no obvious evidence of affinities.

1. *Tail.* The tail is short in *Ifrita*, to judge from the skins about a third of the total overall length. By comparison the tail in *Niltava* is much longer and represents about half the total length. In the babblers it varies from about half the total length in *Malurus alboscapulatus* of New Guinea and more than half in the Australian species, to about half in *Todopsis wallacei*, and a little over a third in *Eupetes*.

2. *Wings.* In *Niltava* species the closed wings are relatively long and straight the tips extending about half-way down the tail. In *Ifrita* they are short and extend barely beyond the base of the tail. In *Todopsis* they are longest, extending nearly a third of the way down the tail, in *Malurus* they are shorter, only a little beyond the base of the tail, and in *Eupetes* falling short of the tail.

A feature of the wings of *Eupetes* is that they are strongly curved to fit closely to the sides of the bird and curve downwards in flight so that in skins they tend to curve inwards on the ventral side of the body. This strong curvature is also apparent in the wings of *Ifrita*.

There are no useful differences in wing-formulae.

3. *Legs and feet.* Desfayes (1967) commented on the fact that *Ifrita* had markedly longer and stronger legs and feet than *Niltava* species, and this is a typical character of all the babblers.

4. *Bill.* The bill of *Ifrita* is relatively short and strong, with unfeathered nostrils, and with a slight tomial notch. The bills of *Niltava* species are similar but with a marked hook at the tip and with nostrils concealed by short dense feathering. The bills of the babbler species under consideration vary in length and compression but resemble that of *Ifrita* in the unfeathered nostrils, and also possess the slight notch.

5. *Rictal bristles.* *Ifrita* possesses a row of fine bristles protruding forward and downward on either side of the base of the upper mandible, and three on either side of the forehead projecting forward over the nostrils. *Niltava* species have a row of five pointing down and outward at either side of the gape and a row of four shorter ones pointing forward over each nostril. Most babbler species appear to possess them at the sides of the gape. In

addition *Todopsis wallacei* has a single long one over each nostril, *Eupetes leucostictus* has two fine ones and a possible small third one over each nostril, *Chenorhamphus grayi* has two long projecting bristles and a third that curves downward arising over the nostrils, and most of the other babblers considered here appear to have none other than at the gape.

6. *Plumage*. The body plumage of *Ifrita* is soft and dense, especially in the region of the lower back, and, in the skins at least, appears as a thick layer covering the base of the tail. This is not apparent in *Niltava* species, but is present in similar fashion in *Eupetes* species. It is absent in the Malurinae, but here the dorsal feathering is specialised and the amount of feathering on the lower rump may be associated with the tendency to carry the tail cocked high.

CONCLUSIONS

In its plumage pattern and colour *Ifrita kowaldi* shows some similarities to *Todopsis wallacei*, and to a lesser extent to *Malurus coronatus* and *Eupetes leucostictus*. These similarities are more fundamental than the superficial resemblance of the blue crown and warm buff body colour of *Niltava*.

In its short tail, short curved wings, long and strong legs and feet, unfeathered nostrils, and dense plumage, *Ifrita* shows a resemblance to the babbler species with which it has been compared, and differs in these respects from *Niltava* species. The evidence of the bill and rictal bristles is inconclusive.

The possession of a distinctive, patterned plumage in both sexes and in subadult birds, such as *Ifrita* possesses, is more typical of babblers than of flycatchers. It is a pity that the juvenile plumage of *Ifrita* is not known, since this might be partly diagnostic.

There would appear to be no reason, on the basis of the characters at present available, to suggest that *Ifrita kowaldi* is a flycatcher, and certainly none to justify making it congeneric with *Niltava*. In view of some of the similarities discussed here its ultimate taxonomic placing might depend on a reviser's opinions concerning the affinities of the Malurinae (*sensu stricta*).

References:

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Campethera abingoni (Smith), 1836, and its type-locality

by P. A. CLANCEY

Received 24th June, 1967

Writing in the *Bull. B.O.C.*, vol. lxxxv, 4, 1965, pp. 64, 65, I showed that the type-locality Durban, Natal, for nominate *Campethera abingoni* (Smith), 1836, was wrong. This was based on the original range data given by Smith in his *Rep. Exped. Expl. Centr. Afr.*, 1836, 53, where it is clearly